

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

Midnite Mine *Wellpinit, Washington*



U S ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY REGION

November 1999

This fact sheet describes the first phase of EPA's study of the Midnite Mine site and explains where you can get more information about the Site.

This September, you may have seen EPA contractors at the Midnite Uranium Mine. They were working on EPA's study of site contamination and cleanup options. Most of this first phase work is now completed, and laboratories are analyzing samples collected at the site. Over the winter, EPA will continue refining plans for the rest of the study, including next year's field work.

What is the purpose of EPA's study?

Before a site can be cleaned up or reclaimed, it is important to understand where the contamination is and what risks the site contamination poses to human health and the environment. For example, at Midnite Mine natural chemicals in the rock react with air and, when in contact with water, make the water acidic. The acidic water then picks up other metals from the rocks. Radioactive materials are also of concern at Midnite.

EPA's study, called a Remedial Investigation (RI), will try to answer questions such as: What kind of health concerns might people face if they live, work, or hunt at or near the site? What are the effects of metals and acidity in the streams on fish and insects? How is water affected as it moves underground and over the surface of the mined area? What controls might work to prevent clean water from entering the mined area and keep contaminated water from getting out.

Once information about the site is gathered, EPA evaluates various cleanup options in a Feasibility Study (FS). The cleanup options are evaluated using criteria that include overall protection of human health and the environment, cost, and community acceptance. EPA then recommends

a cleanup option and asks the community to comment. After EPA considers the comments and selects a final cleanup plan, the plan is designed and constructed. At sites like this, the study, decision, and cleanup often takes six to ten years.

This year's field work is nearly finished

As the temperature drops and the days grow shorter, our contractors have worked hard to finish installing and sampling the planned wells. EPA has installed 52 monitoring wells in areas around the mine for two reasons:

1. To understand the water conditions in nearby areas not affected by mining, and
2. To understand the mine's impacts on water moving from the mined area downstream.

Monitoring wells are small diameter wells, unlike drinking water wells. Well depth varies depending on the type of information we need from that location. We use the wells to look at groundwater flow direction and other aspects that affect groundwater movement. We also sample water from the wells to understand how the water is interacting with the chemicals in the rocks.



This year, EPA sampled stream sediments and water in area outside the mine for the same reasons. We will be returning for additional water samples at the same wells and streams in early spring to observe seasonal changes. Maps showing where wells were installed and water and sediment samples were collected this year can be viewed at the Spokane Tribal Natural Resources office.

In addition to the URS-Greiner field work at the mine, EPA technical staff scanned the road between the mine and Dawn's mill at Ford to assess whether ore may have dropped from trucks during transport to the millsite. You may have passed a slow-moving white truck doing this work during the week of September 27. Results from this work will be available later this fall.

The Midnite Mine Site

Midnite Mine is an inactive open-pit uranium mine located eight miles northwest of Wellpinit on the Spokane Tribe Reservation. Between 1955 and 1981, Dawn Mining Company (DMC) mined for uranium ore. Much of the ore was milled at the Dawn millsite in Ford, but the waste rock and piles of ore/protore remain on site. Four of the pits were refilled with waste rock during the mine operations. Two pits remain open and contain contaminated water that animals can drink from.

Since 1992, DMC has been required to collect contaminated water flowing from the mined areas. The water is treated on-site to remove contamination and is discharged to a surface drainage that leads to Blue Creek. Sludge from the water treatment is transported by truck to DMC's mill, processed to extract uranium, and disposed of in the lined tailings disposal pond at the mill. While this effort has helped reduce the amount of contaminated water leaving the site, a more effective and permanent control is needed.

EPA proposed Midnite Mine to the Superfund list of sites eligible for federal cleanup funds in February of 1999.

Who is doing the work?

EPA has hired an environmental consulting firm called URS-Greiner to conduct the RI/FS. For this year's field work, URS-Greiner hired Jeff Moyer, a local contractor, to clear and grade roads and work areas, while staff from White Shield, a Native American company, worked as part of the URS-Greiner field staff doing sampling and other field work. Cascade, a Seattle-based company, drilled and developed the wells.

Next year's work will include additional sampling, and will focus more on the mined area where rock piles and pits remain from the mining activities at the site. URS will be developing detailed plans for next year's field work this winter as the sampling results come in from laboratories. EPA is working with the Spokane Tribal Natural Resources Department and interested federal agencies to develop these plans. Where possible, information collected in previous years by the Tribe, BIA, other agencies and the mining company will be used in the study.

The mining company still has responsibilities at the site, including collecting contaminated water seeping from the ground below the mine, pumping this water to one of the open pits, and then treating the water at the water treatment plant.

Community Involvement Plan completed

EPA held a public meeting in July to answer any questions about the upcoming study and to hear the community's concerns about the site. This information, and EPA's plan on how to involve interested community members, is contained in a document called the Community Involvement Plan. The Community Involvement Plan is available for your review at the Spokane Tribal Natural Resources Department.



How can I find out more?

EPA is planning a community meeting in Wellpinit within the next couple of months, so think about your questions.

You can see the plans that were used for this year's field work at the Spokane Tribal Natural Resources Department. The Department has graciously agreed to keep all future information and reports on this project.

You are welcome to call EPA's toll-free number during business hours to discuss questions or concerns with the project manager, Elly Hale or the community involvement coordinator, Krista Rave. That number is 1-800-424-4372 (ask for extension -1215 for Elly, and -6686 for Krista).

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting one of the EPA representatives.



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